PUNCH-MARKED COINS FROM VAIŚĀLĪ

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In 1955, on the eve of his departure for America, the late Dr. A. S. Altekar gave me 52 silver Punch-marked coins for examination, which were sent to him by Shri J. C. Mathur, the then Education Secretary, Bihar Government.

These coins formed part of a big hoard, which was discovered at Basārh, the ancient Vaiśālī, near the Aśokan pillar. But major portion of the hoard, it is believed, were melted before they could be saved. Had the entire hoard been available, it might have been of great help in solving some of the vexed problems of this branch of Indian numismatics.

A small note was then prepared by me and was handed over along with the coins to the late Dr. A. S. Altekar on his coming back from America. The coins are most probably deposited in the Vaiśālī Sangh; but nothing is known about the note. Now, the present paper is being published on the basis of that note.

Of the 52 coins, a broken piece, weighing 27.5 grains was the most interesting of the lot. It had a small hole, which suggested that it might have been worn like an amulet or ornament. The coin was the most worn of the lot. The symbols on the coin were indistinct; but the traces that were there and the fabric of the coin suggested that it was quite different from the common punch-marked coins of the five symbols. In all probability, it belonged to some local series that were issued by the local states, before the rise of the Magadhan empire. If it was the issue of the Lichchhavis of Vaiśālī or any other state or was the early coin of Magadha, we have at present no means to determine. The coin is illustrated here **(Pl. No. 1)**

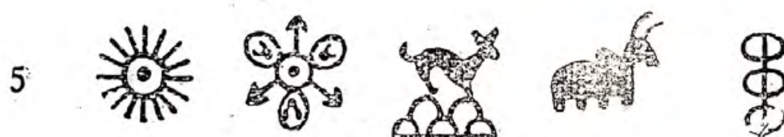
The remaining 51 coins are of the well known type of five symbols, belonging to Magadhan empire. They may be distinguished into following varieties :



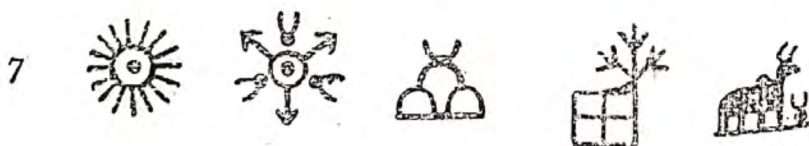








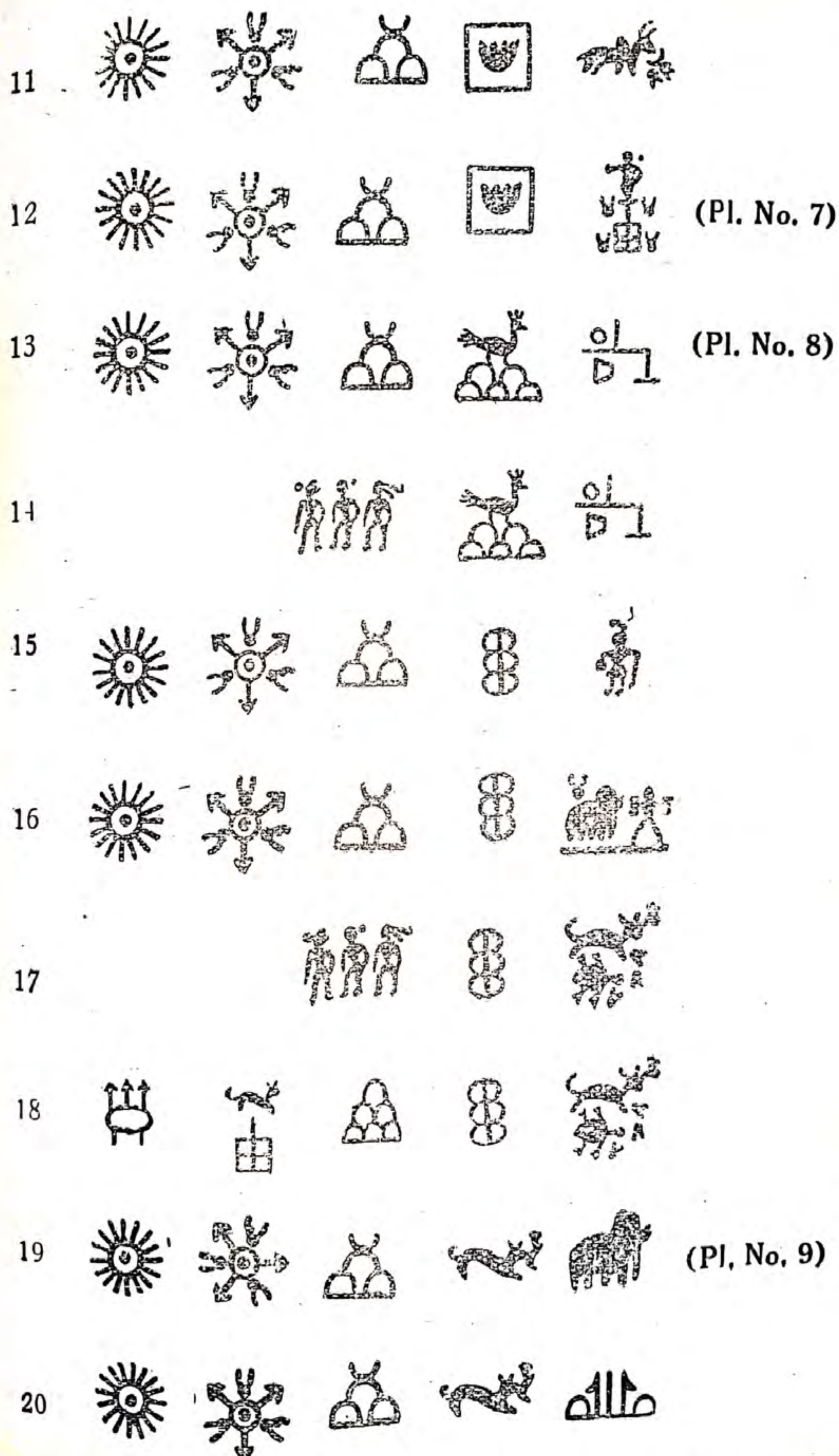












None of the above varieties are unknown from other sources. According to the classification that is now current

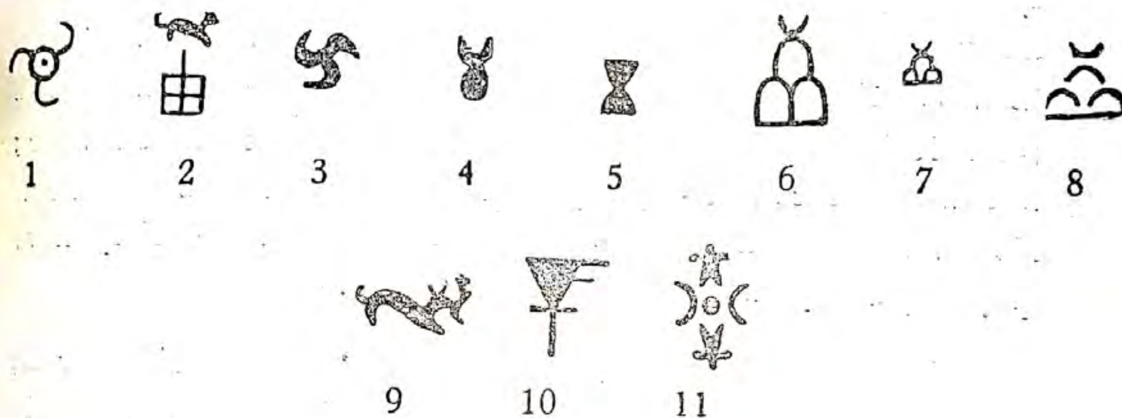
amongst the numismatists, the first six varieties belong to pre-Mauryan period and the rest to the Mauryan period. But the recent studies of the punch-marked coins have shown that variety 6 was in all probability issued in the period of Chandragupta Maurya and varieties 7 to 20 can no longer be dated earlier than Aśoka. As such the coins, though found near the Aśokan column, would have been buried long after Aśoka. But in the absence of the hoard value of these coins, we are unable to adduce any conclusion of importance.

However, these coins had drawn my attention to certain interesting facts regarding the reverse marks of the Mauryan coins, which have not yet received adequate attention. I would, therefore, take this occasion to place those observations here.

(i) It is generally found that each group of the coins of the class having third or class symbol "three-arched hill with crescent" have a fixed reverse symbol. In other words, a particular reverse marks are seen on these coins, only on the coins that have a particular fourth mark on the obverse. But a careful study of the coins now show that this belief is not correct in case of all the groups of the coins belonging to "three-arched hill with crescent" class. They are true only in the case of the following groups :

	Fourth symbol	Reverse symbol	Represented here by varieties
1.			7, 8 and 9
2.			10, 11, 12
3.			13, 14
4.			15, 16, 17, 18

(ii) Here too, it is not correct to think that all these coins have on the reverse only one bold reverse mark. It has been noticed that coins of only certain varieties, within each group, have only one symbol on the reverse. On other varieties, some associate symbols are found along with the reverse symbol of the group. Here varieties 8 and 9 of Group 1; Variety 12 of Group 2; Variety 15 of group 15, are found to have a single reverse marks. Other varieties have some associate marks.



Reverse marks.

Variety 7 of group 1 are known here by 12 coins. Four of them have a treskelis (fig. 1) as the associate mark along with the group reverse mark **(Pl. 10)**. The other eight have the exclusive group reverse mark. The British Museum has many coins of this variety; two of them are known with an associate mark on the reverse (2, I, b-c; *B. M. C.* p. 19-20, coins 35-36) and on one of them the associate mark is treskelis. None of the coins of Small Bhir Mound hoard of this variety is known with the associate mark; but 12 out of 35 coins in Taxila (*B.H.U.* No. 1) and 6 out of 102 coins in Taxila (*B. H. U.* No. 2) have this associate mark. The three Rairh hoards have 2, 17 and 14 coins of this variety. As among them 2, 2 and 27 respectively have treskelis as associated reverse mark. In Patraha hoard only two out of 30 coins have the treskelis as associated mark. On the other hand, no coins known from three hoards found in the old Hyderabad state are known with the associate mark. However, this brings to light the

fact that while most of the coins of this variety do not have an associate mark with the group reverse symbol, some have treskelis (fig. 1) as an associate mark. Another associate mark is also known on the coins of this variety, which is seen only on a coin in the British Museum (2. I. c).

Variety 11 of Group 2 is known in the present lot with a single coin, which has 'pup-on-pole' symbol (fig. 2) as the associate mark on the reverse along with its group reverse symbol. This associate mark is also known on two coins of this variety in Patraha hoard. One out of seven coins in Taxila (*B.H.U.*, No. 1) has this associate mark. One of the coins from Rairh hoard is said to have this mark on the reverse; but the presence of the group reverse mark on it is not recorded. However, it is clear that some of the coins of this variety have 'pup-on-pole' symbol as the associate mark.

Variety 12 of Group 2 is known here by a single coin, on which only the group reverse mark is seen. But coins in Rairh hoards are known to have associate mark. Four marks were found there as associate marks, and one of them is treskelis (fig. 1.) The coins of this variety so far could not be carefully examined by me and so, I defer my comment on the identification of more than one type of associate mark on the coins of Rairh hoards. However, it may be said that some coins of this variety have some associate marks.

Variety 13 of Group 3 is known here by 8 coins. Of them two coins have treskelis (fig. 1) as the associate mark along with the reverse group mark. Some coins of Patraha hoard also have treskelis as the associate mark. In Rairh hoards also coins with this associate marks, are in sufficient number. There a few other associate marks were noticed with the reverse group mark. But coins from Taxila and Hyderabad area are not known with any associate marks. One of the coins of the present lot has a small treskelis (fig. 3) besides the associate mark—big treskelis (fig. 1). If this third symbol on the reverse were deliberate or accidental, it is not possible to say.

Coins of variety 15 of Group 4 are four in number. Here they have no associate mark with the reverse group mark. But a coin in the Rairh hoards is known with the associate mark treskelis (fig. 1) and two or three coins in the British Museum have another symbol as the associate mark. Thus, this variety seems to have more than one associate mark, but any one of them is found on any coin.

A single coin of Variety 16 of Group 4 is in the present lot which has a 'taurine' (fig. 4) as the associate mark **(Pl. 11)** This associate mark is seen on all the coins known in the Rairh and Patraha hoards and also on the coins in the British Museum. This variety is different from the varieties discussed above in the sense that no coin is known without the associate mark.

Coins of varieties 17 and 18, which are one each in the lot, have two associate marks with the reverse group mark. They are treskelis (fig. 1) and dumbell (fig. 5) **(Pl. 12).** Most of the coins of this variety have these two associate marks. But, in the British Museum, we have a coin where two other associate marks are found (*B.M.C.*, 2. II. h, coin 29); and on one, only one associate mark treskelis (fig. 1) is found (*B.M.C.*, 2. II, g, coin 28) but it is not unlikely that there might have been the other associate mark (fig. 5) also as some faint traces of a symbol are there.

A careful examination of the associate marks on the reverse shows clearly that they are not countermarks, stamped at some later date, after the issue of the coins. But they appear to have been struck along with the reverse group symbol at the time of the original striking. As such they might have some associated significance. Therefore, for detailed studies, it is necessary that our classification of the punch-marked coins, of the class having 'three-arched hill with crescent', should be more elaborate and divided into sub-varieties on the basis of the associate marks.

It is not possible to suggest the meaning of the associate marks ; but it appears to be certain that the coins having two or more reverse marks, were different issues from the coins having only one mark, i.e., the reverse group mark. The associate marks might be indicative of a sub-mint, under the main mint, represented by the group reverse mark, or they might be indicating, subsequent issues. Since in most cases treskelis (fig. 1) is the associate mark, there should be some commonness or affinity between all the various groups of the coins.

(iii) Coins of varieties 19 and 20, though belong to the same class which have the class mark 'three-arched hill with crescent", are quite different from the coins of other groups of that class, in the matter of their reverse. They do not have a common reverse mark for the group, having any association with the obverse fourth mark.

The two varieties represented here appear to have their own different reverse marks. Variety 19, with the elephant as the fifth mark, are ten in number. They have "three-arched hill with crescent" on the reverse. This symbol is found on these coins in no less than two forms (Figs 6, 7). And, the forms seem related with the fabrics of the coins. Nine coins of the present lot are made from the cuttings of the metal sheets. They have the reverse 'three-arched hill with crescent' symbol in an elongated form (fig. 6) **(Pl. 13).** The remaining one coin, which is made of globule, has the symbol in the minute form (fig. 7). Again, among the coins of cut sheets, five, which are of thin fabric, have the reverse mark (fig. 6) alone, while the other five, which are of medium fabric have an associate symbol—treskelis (fig. 1) **(Pl. 14).** Thus, the coins of this variety may be distinguished into three sub-varieties.

These three sub-varieties are noticed in other hoards also. Taxila hoard (*B. H. U.* No. 2) has 20 coins of this variety. Seven of them have indistinct reverse. Of the remaining, seven, those of thin square fabric, have the elongated symbol (fig. 6) ; three other, those of medium fabric, have the same

symbol with the associate symbol 'treskelis (fig. 1). The remaining three are of the globule fabric and they have the symbol in minute form (fig. 7). In Taxila hoard (*B.H.U.* No. 2), the number of these coins is 18 and there too these distinctions are noticed.

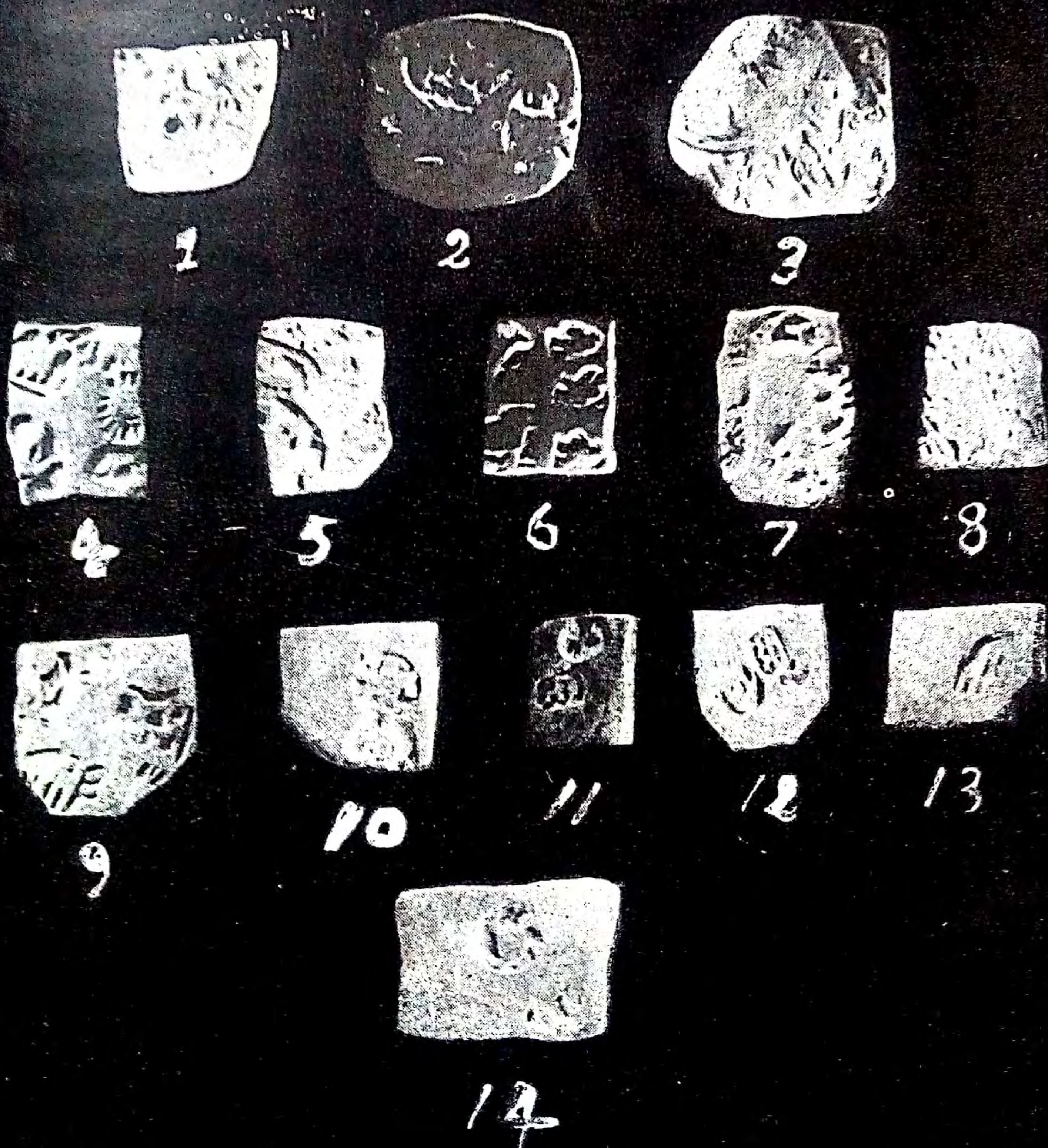
In Patraha hoard, 43 coins are of this variety. Bhattacharya has identified three forms of the symbol among them. Besides the above two (fig. 6 and 7), he has identified the symbol in its normal form (fig. 8). However, there is nothing in his *Memoir* to verify these distinctions. But it is noteworthy that none of the coins of that hoard are attributed with the associate symbol–treskelis (fig. 1), though some of them are assigned with some unidentifiable marks. The single coin in the Rairh hoard has the elongated form of the symbol (fig. 6). Of the twelve coins of the Gulbarga hoard, three have the elongated symbol (fig. 6) and two of them bear the associate symbol-treskelis (fig. 1). Here on one coin the associate symbol with the 'three-arched hill with crescent' is 'hare-with-pup-in-mouth' (fig. 9). 'Hare-with-pup in mouth' alone is seen on one coin. Treskelis (fig. 1) alone is seen on one coin. Karimnagar hoard has 8 coins: of them three have indistinct reverse. The remaining five have 'hare-with-pup-in-mouth' without the main reverse symbol 'three-arched hill with crescent'.

These coins bring out that (i) some coins of this type are known with 'three-arched hill with crescent' on the reverse, which is the third symbol on the obverse. This symbol is seen in three forms. Some of the coins having this reverse have treskelis (fig. 1) as the associate mark; (ii) some coins have 'hare-with-pup-in-mouth' (fig. 9) symbol on the reverse, which is the fourth obverse symbol, of this coin group; and (iii) some have 'three-arched hill with crescent' and 'hare-with-pup-in-mouth' both, which are the third and fourth symbols of the coin group, together on the reverse. That the coins having treskelis alone, constitute a sub-variety cannot be suggested. Quite possible it is the associate mark on the coins, but the main symbol is lost.

(iv) The coins of variety 20 are known by a single coin in the present lot. Here we have two minute symbols. One is the Jayadhvaja symbol (fig. 10) and only the traces of the other are visible. So exact form of the symbol cannot be suggested. The coins of this variety in the British Museum are catalogued as having the 'Taxila symbol' (fig. 11) in most cases. Taxila mark is uniformly shown for this variety of Patraha hoard in Bhattacharya's *Memoir*. Some of the coins of Rairh hoards are attributed to the Taxila mark, while others are shown with different minute marks, which are seen on the coins of Pre-Mauryan varieties.

Careful study of the coins of this variety in a large number is necessary before any thing could be said about them. Yet, it appears that the coins may be distinguished into two distinct sub-varieties, (i) having the minute symbols: these seem to have followed the tradition that was current from the earlier period and so they might be the earliest coins of the class, and (ii) having the Taxila symbol (fig. 11) as the reverse mark. These coins are later issues, issued after suspending the use of minute symbols.

In the light of these observations, it is hoped that numismatists, working on the punch-marked coins, would kindly take care of observing the reverse marks and classifying the coins accordingly.



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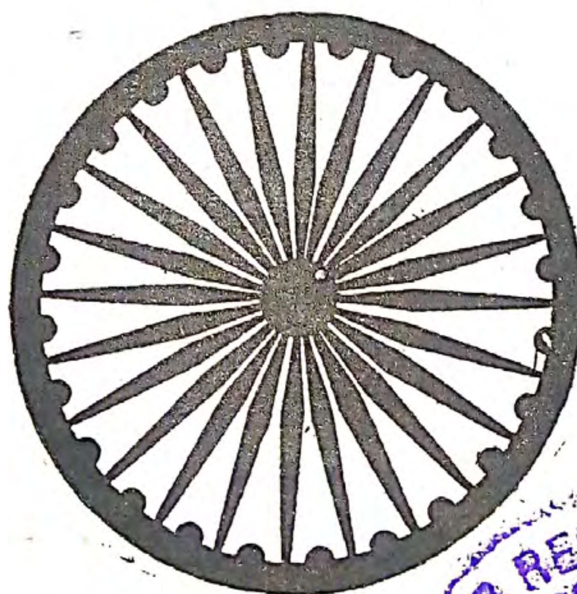
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